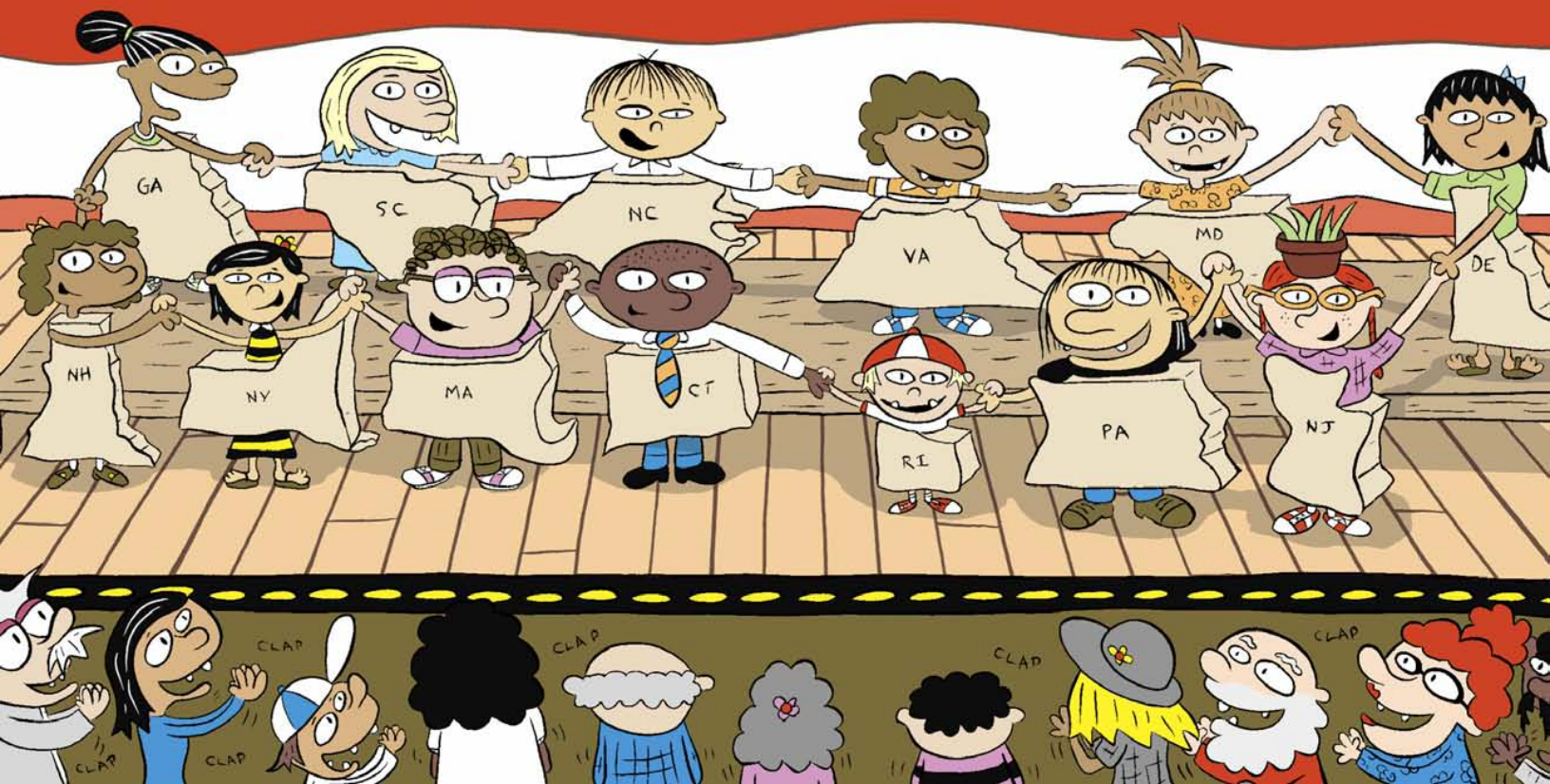
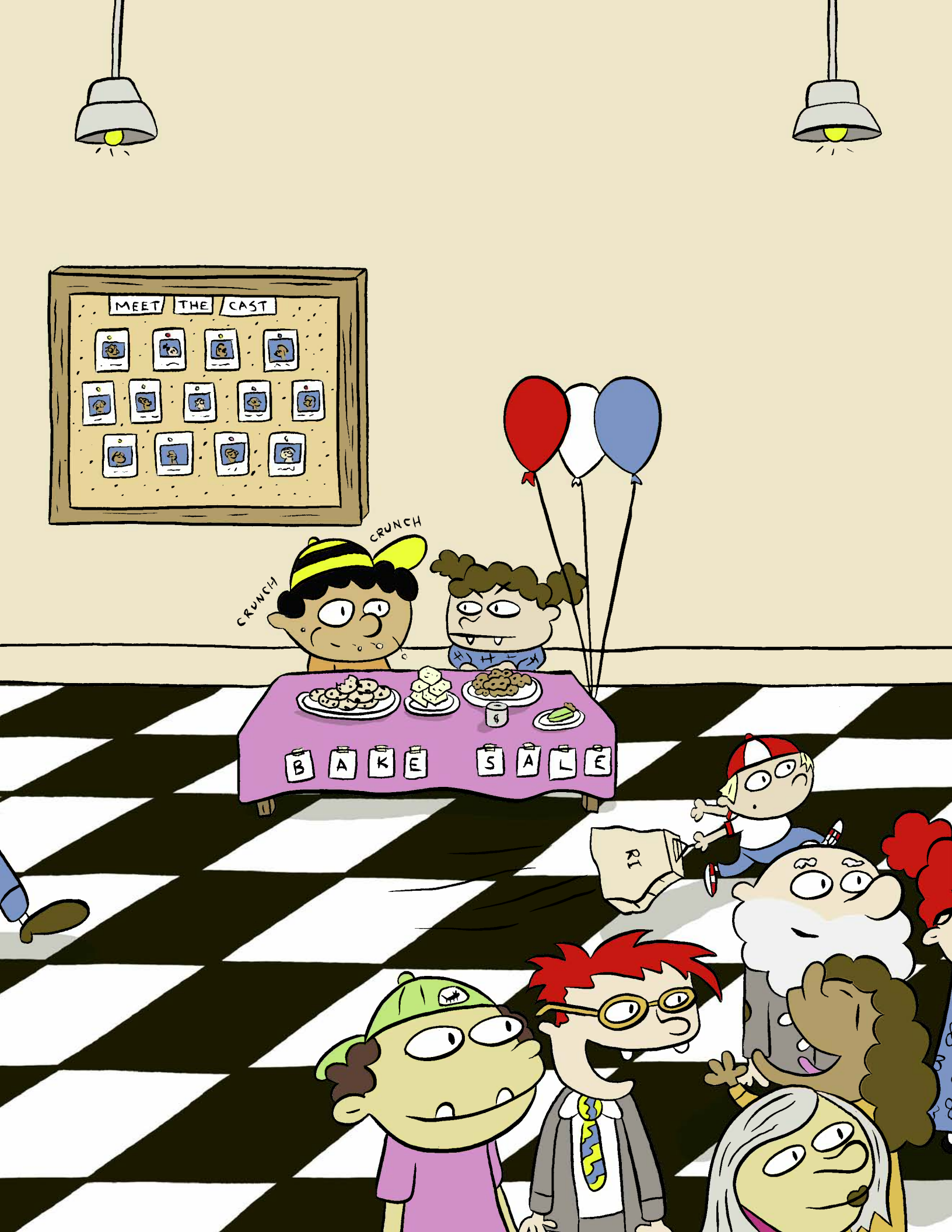
Jacqueline Jules ★ Illustrated by Jef Czekaj

UNITE or DIE

How Thirteen States Became a Nation

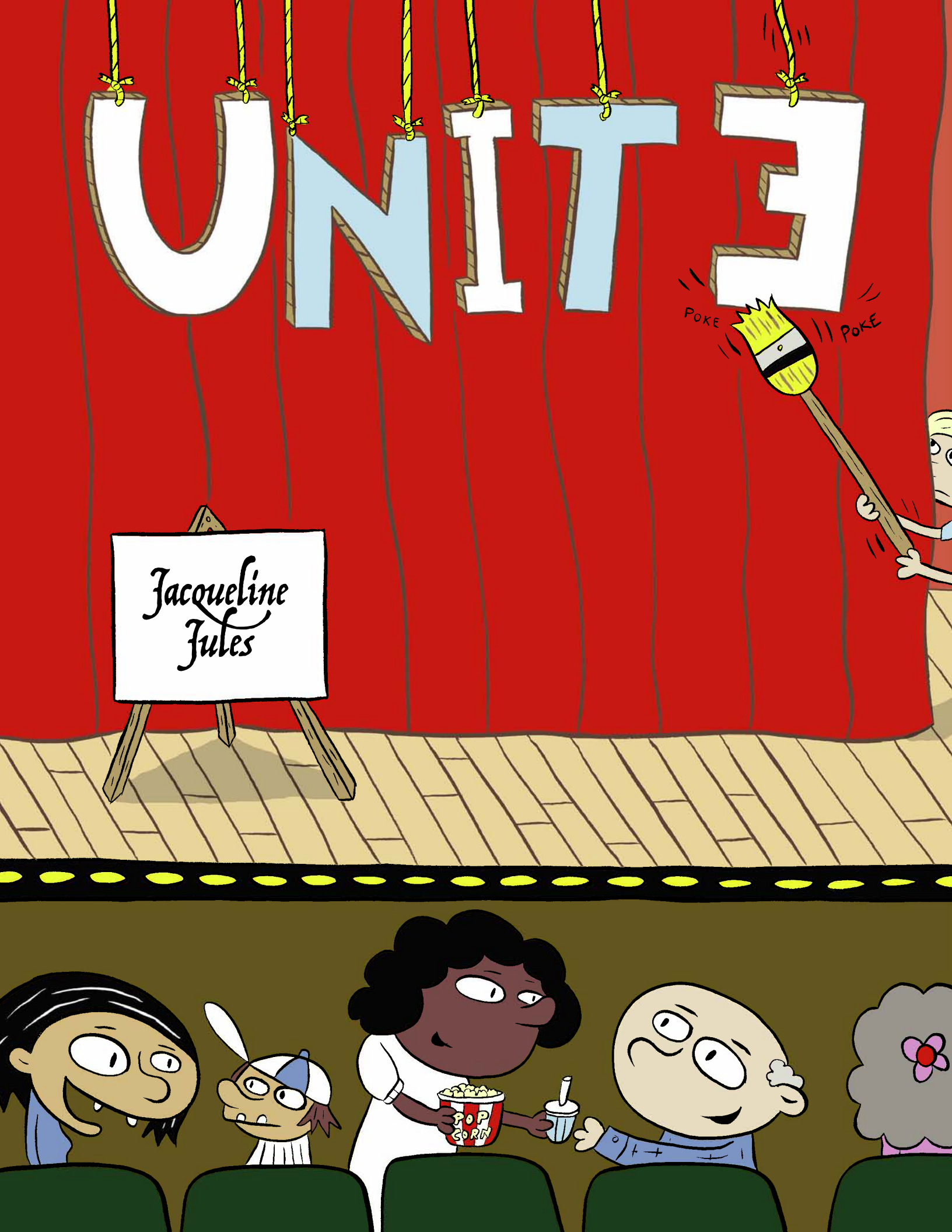


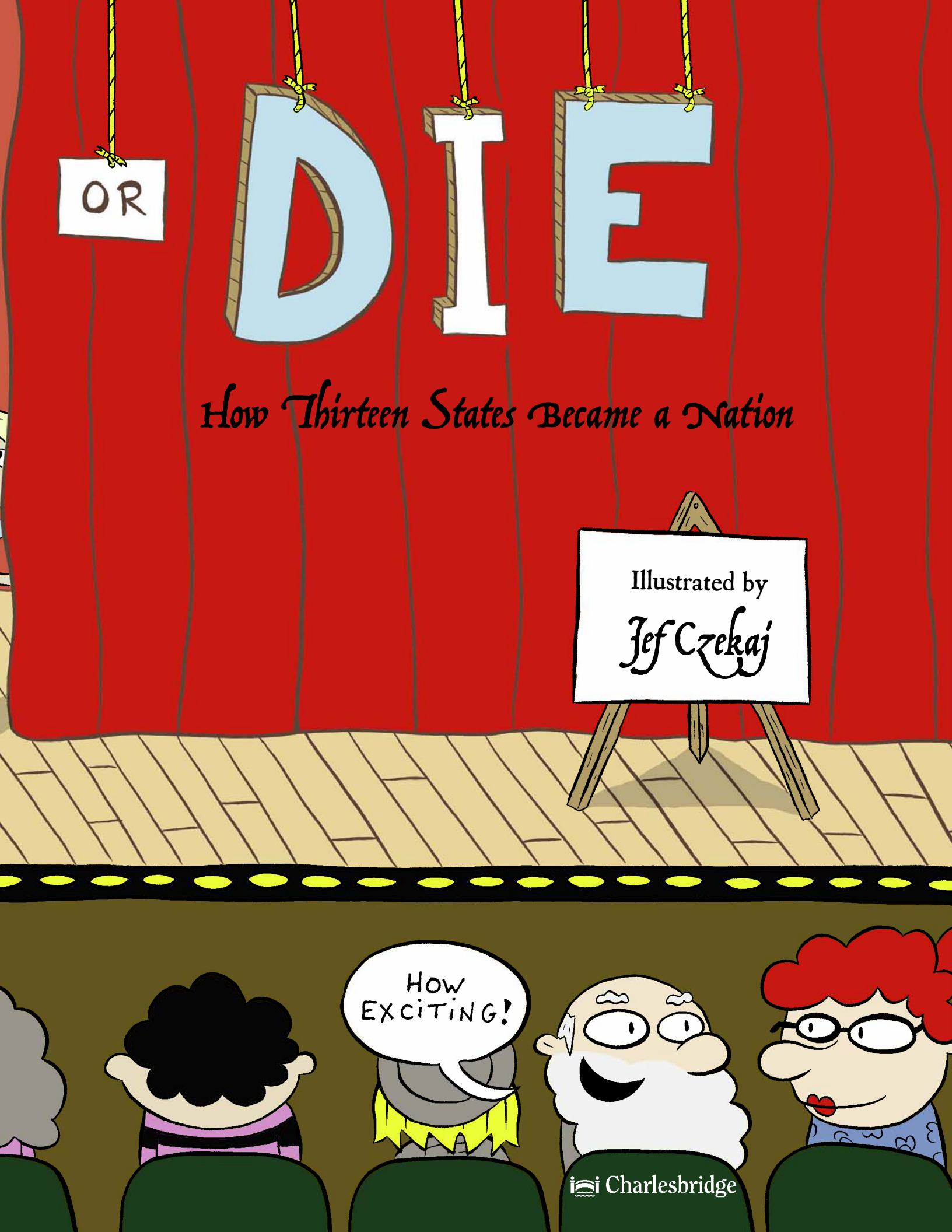
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
TONIGHT ONLY
UNITE OR DIE!
7:30 P.M.


MEET THE CAST
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
BAKE SALE

Unite or Die

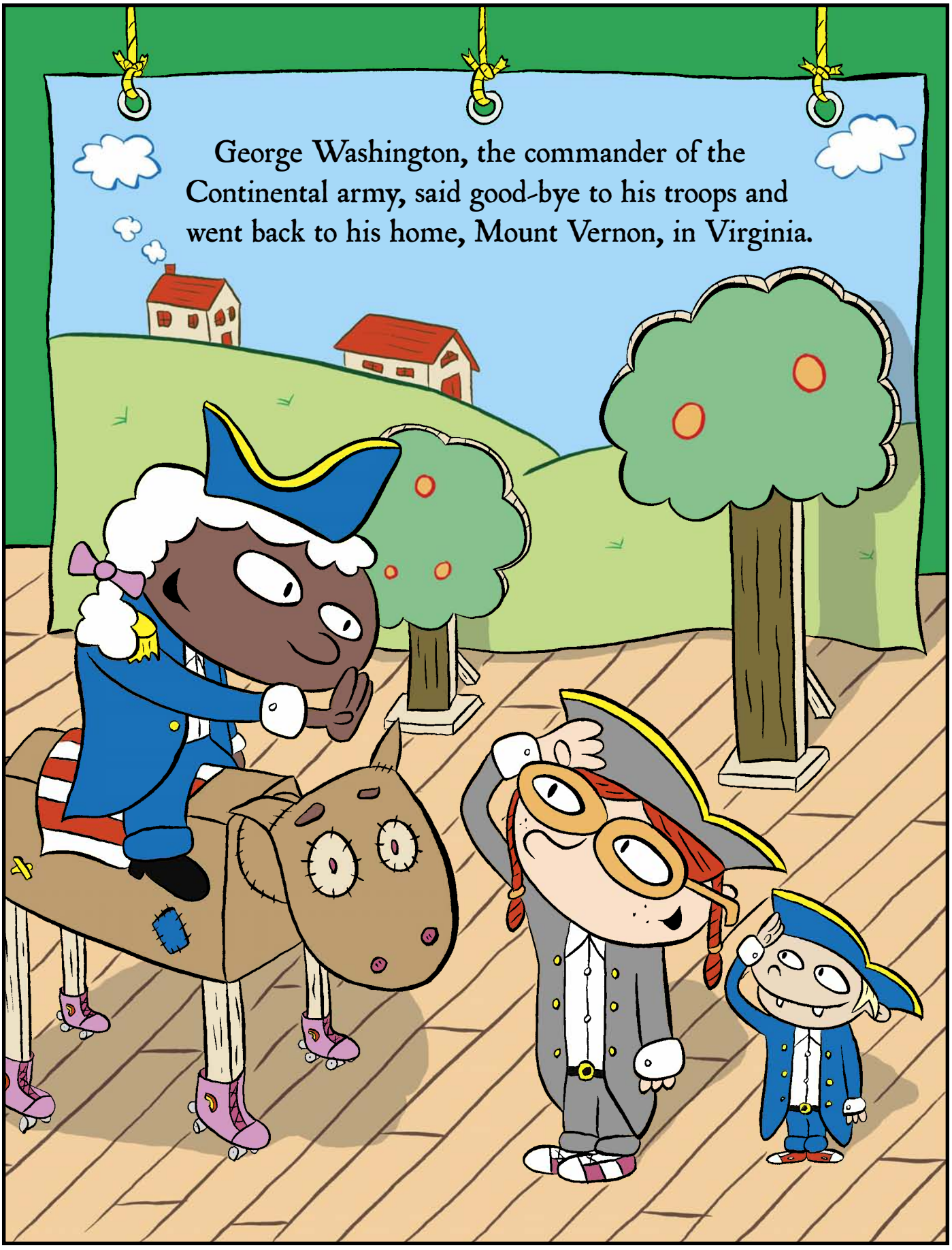
How Thirteen States Became a Nation

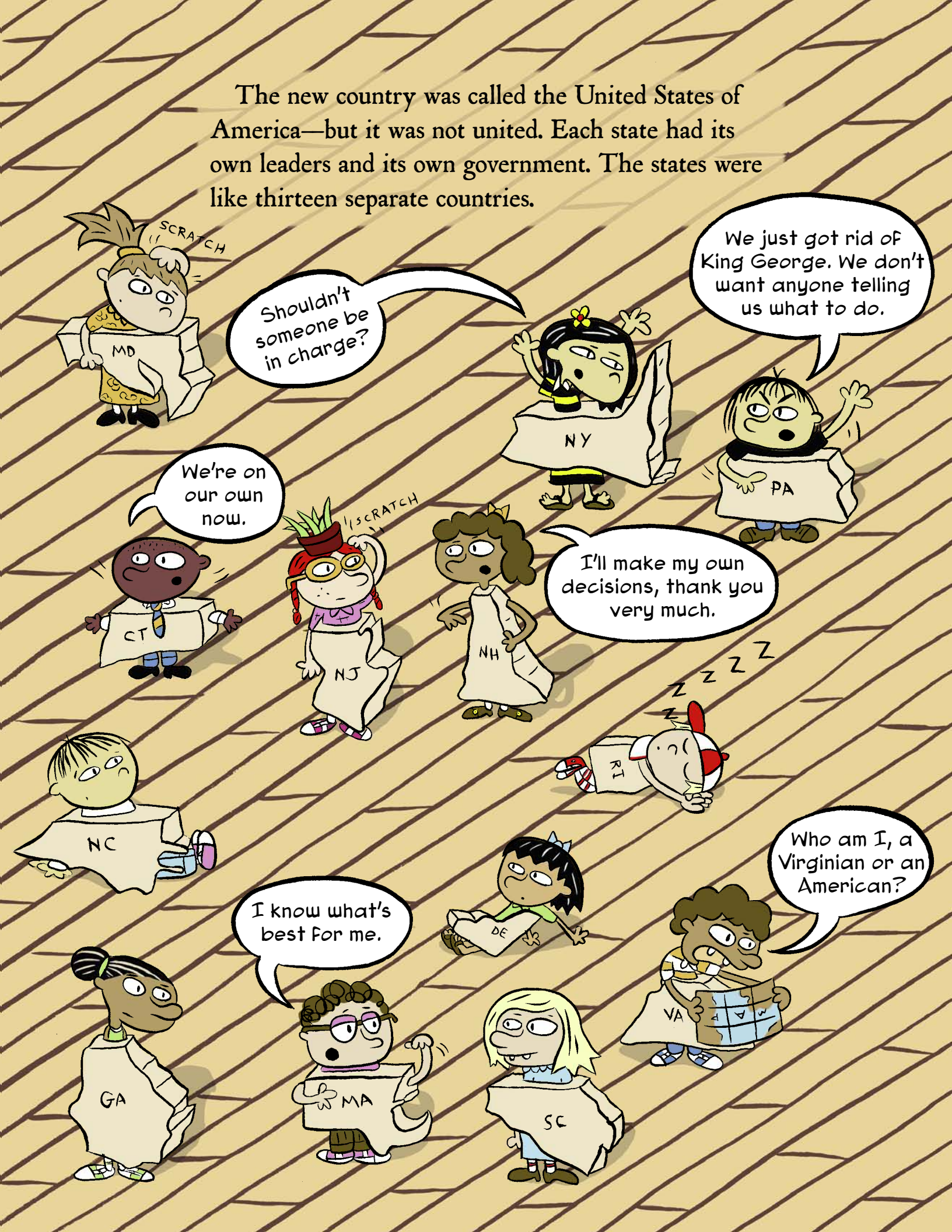

UNITE
POKE
POKE
Jacqueline Jules
POP CORN

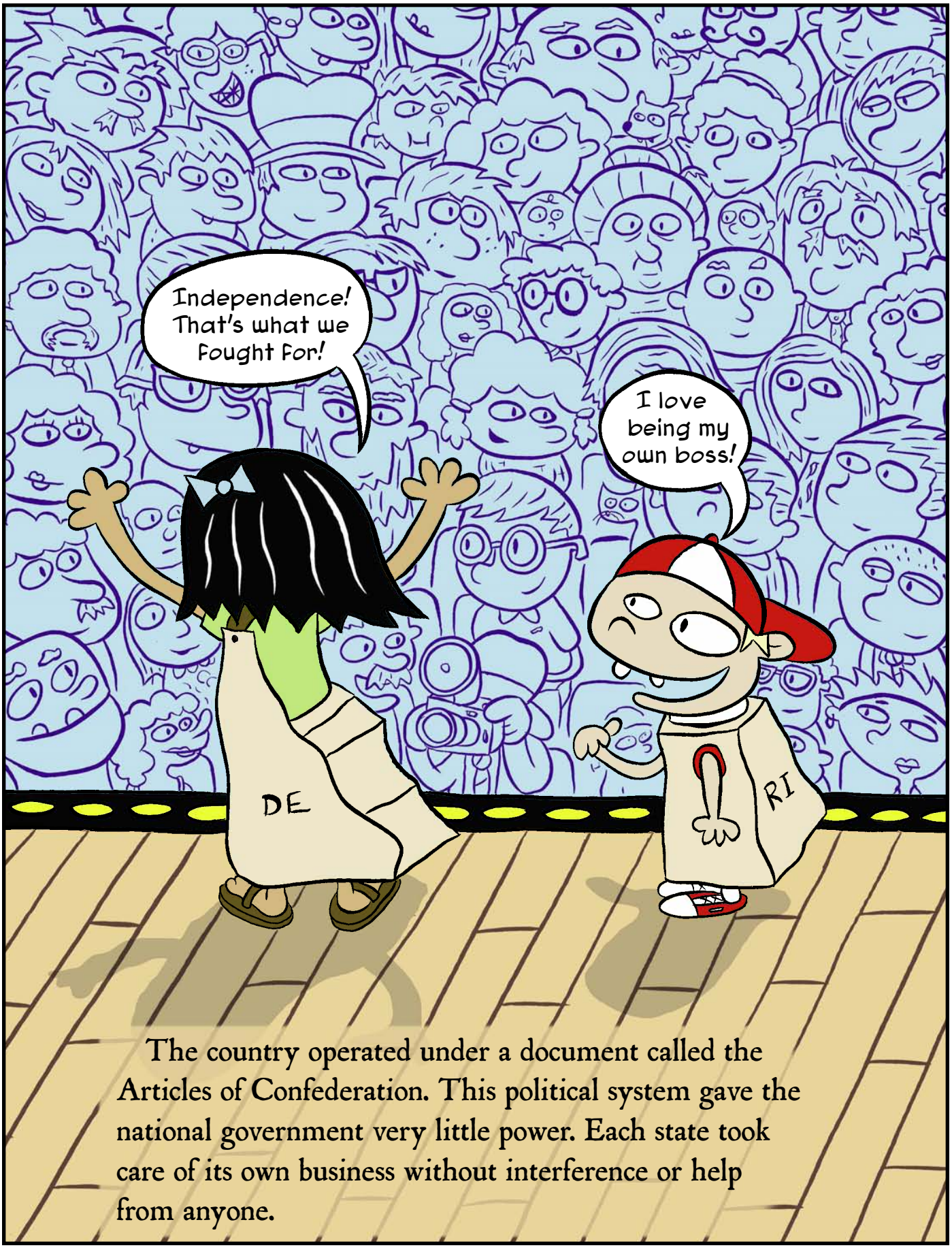

OR
DIE
How Thirteen States Became a Nation
Illustrated by
Jef Czekaj
HOW EXCITING!
Charlesbridge

On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris
was signed, officially ending the American Revolution.
Thirteen colonies had won their independence from England.
A new country was born.
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP

Hooray! Freedom!
MA
Now we can govern ourselves.
MD
Are we ready?
GA
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP


George Washington, the commander of the Continental army, said good-bye to his troops and went back to his home, Mount Vernon, in Virginia.

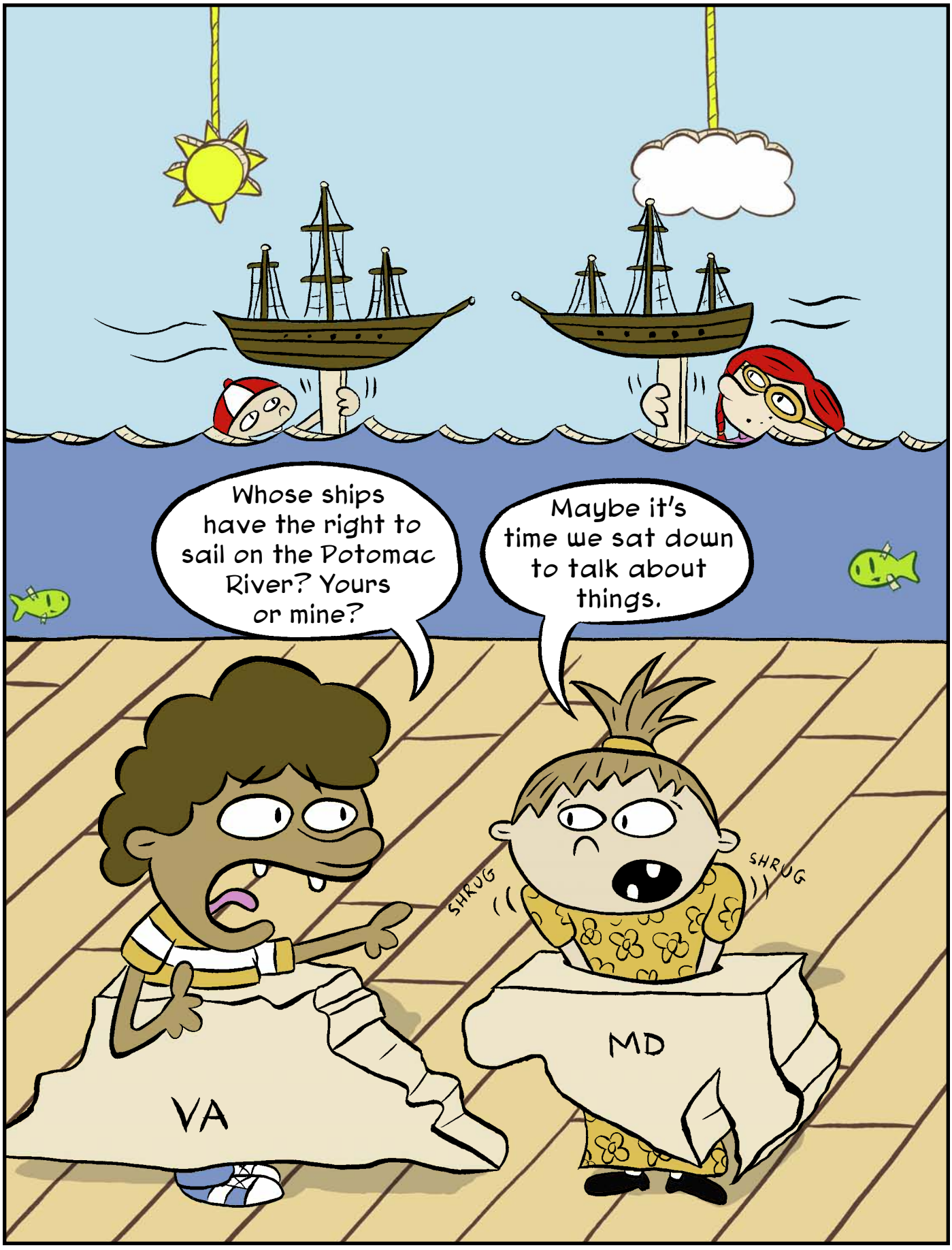

The new country was called the United States of America—but it was not united. Each state had its own leaders and its own government. The states were like thirteen separate countries.
SCRATCH
MD
Shouldn't someone be in charge?
NY
We just got rid of King George. We don't want anyone telling us what to do.
PA
We're on our own now.
CT
SCRATCH
NJ
NH
I'll make my own decisions, thank you very much.
Z Z Z Z
RI
NC
I know what's best for me.
DE
Who am I, a Virginian or an American?
GA
MA
SC
VA



The country operated under a document called the Articles of Confederation. This political system gave the national government very little power. Each state took care of its own business without interference or help from anyone.

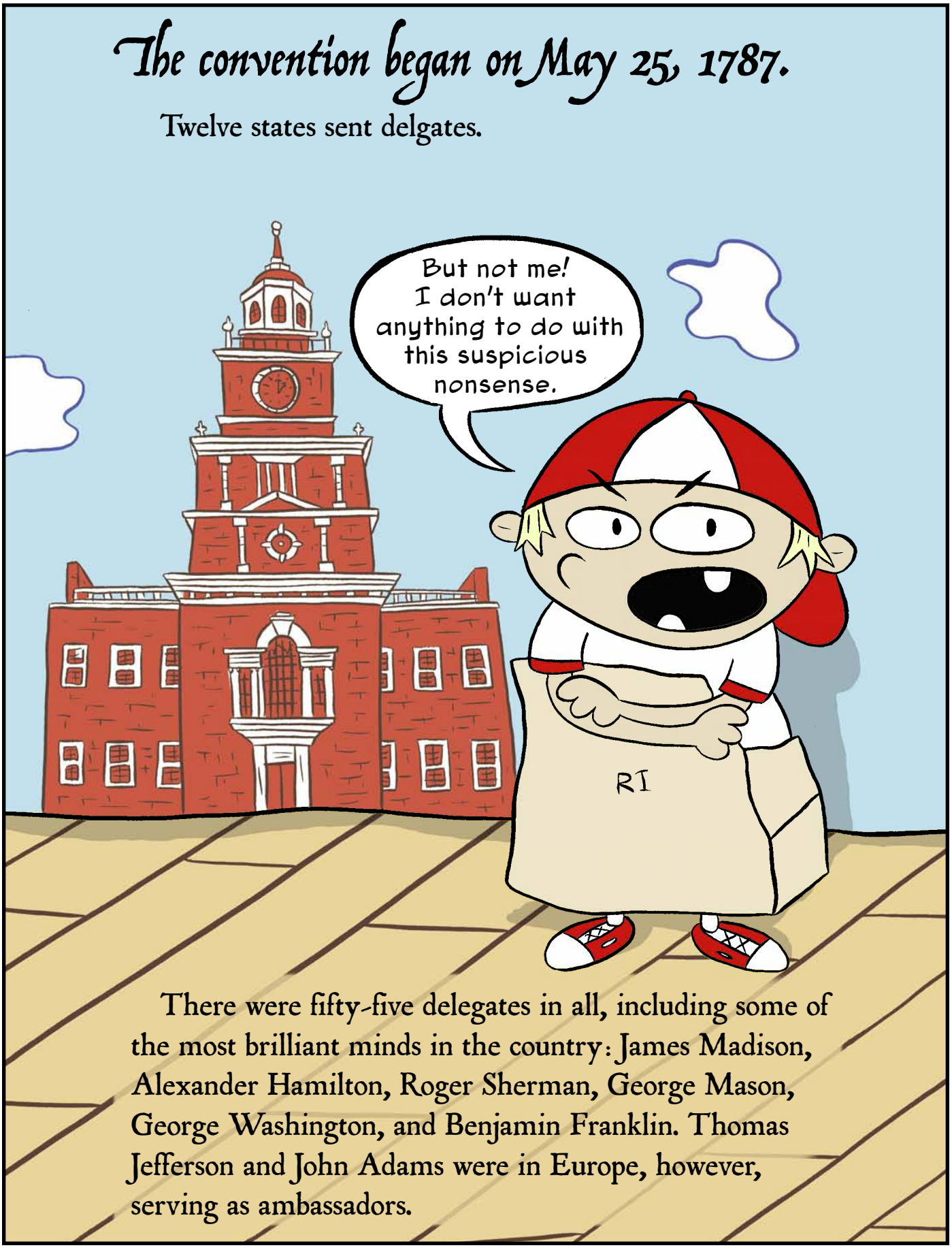
But being thirteen independent states had its drawbacks. Without a strong national government, it wasn't easy for the states to trade with one another or with foreign countries.

There was no one to settle disagreements over borders and trade. There was no one to provide help if a state was in trouble.
How can we decide once and for all who owns what? New Hampshire is trying to claim land that belongs to me.
Not true! That land belongs to me!
NY
NH
MA
You think you have problems? I have a rebellion on my hands. A man named Daniel Shays and his angry mob of farmers are threatening me. Can the government help?
Sorry! You'll have to take care of Daniel Shays yourself.


Whose ships have the right to sail on the Potomac River? Yours or mine?
Maybe it's time we sat down to talk about things.
SHRUG
SHRUG
VA
MD

In September 1786, delegates from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York gathered in Annapolis, Maryland. They discussed the problems among the states and identified what had to be done.

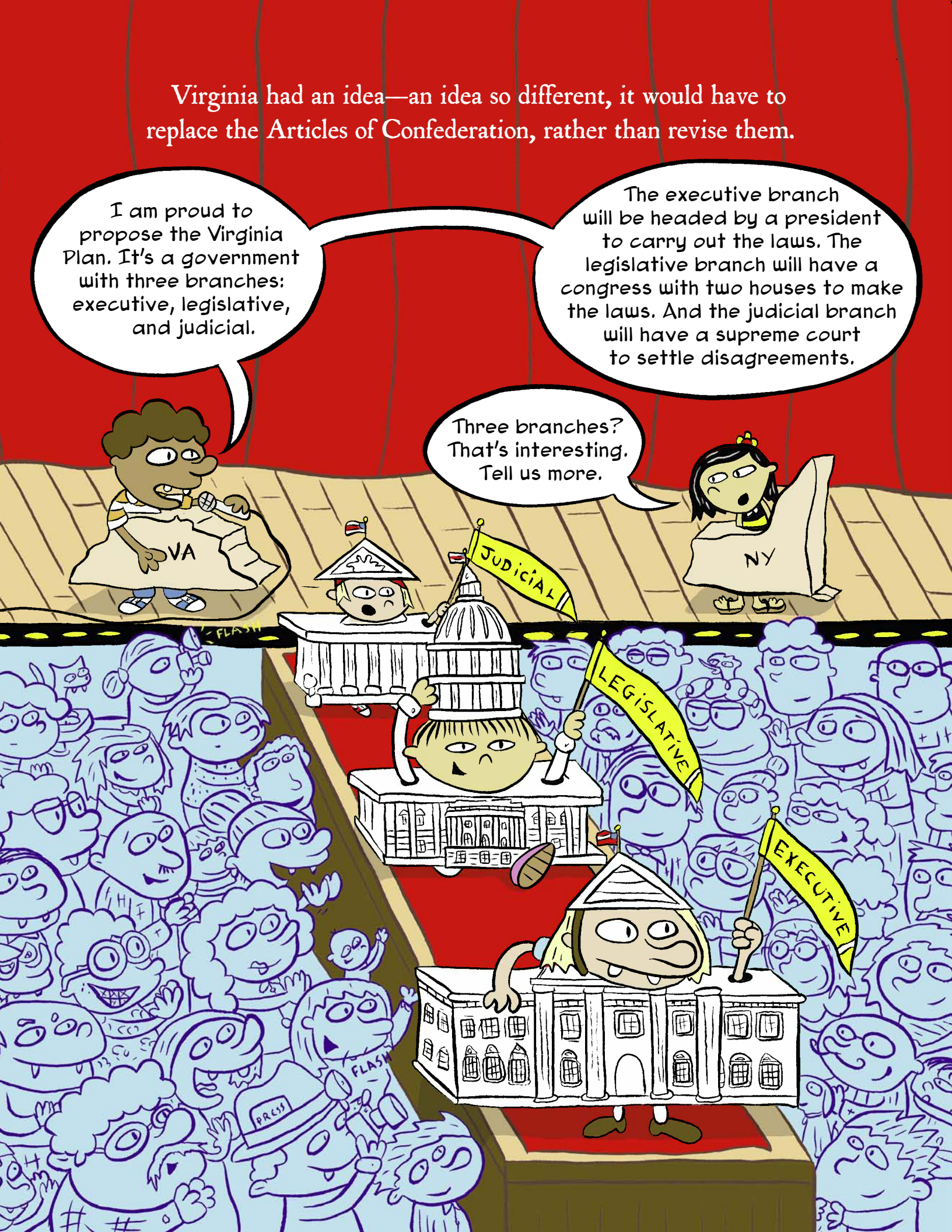
The Articles of Confederation make the national government helpless and hopeless. We need a government that works!
Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union
DE
VA
PA
But we only have five states represented here. What can we do?
We can call another convention. We can ask everyone to come and help revise the Articles of Confederation.
That's an excellent idea! Let's meet in Philadelphia, in the same hall where the Declaration of Independence was signed.


The convention began on May 25, 1787.
Twelve states sent delgates.
But not me! I don't want anything to do with this suspicious nonsense.
RI
There were fifty-five delegates in all, including some of the most brilliant minds in the country: James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Roger Sherman, George Mason, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were in Europe, however, serving as ambassadors.

Make way for the honorable Benjamin Franklin!
NY
PA
Eighty-one years old and still full of style!
DE
Look! He's being carried to the statehouse in a fancy sedan chair. How chic!
NJ
There's General George Washington! You know this meeting is important if he's here.
Everybody admires the general. Let's put him in charge of this assembly.
SC
MD

As president of the convention, George Washington sat in a beautiful carved chair. He had a front-row seat for all the arguments.

Doors were locked and guards were stationed outside. There were no meetings with the press. The delegates were serious about keeping their conversations private.
I feel like a prisoner. There's a guard outside.
Stop your complaining! Do you want the whole country to know we're changing the government?
We better keep an eye on old Ben Franklin. He's got a loose tongue!
VA
GA

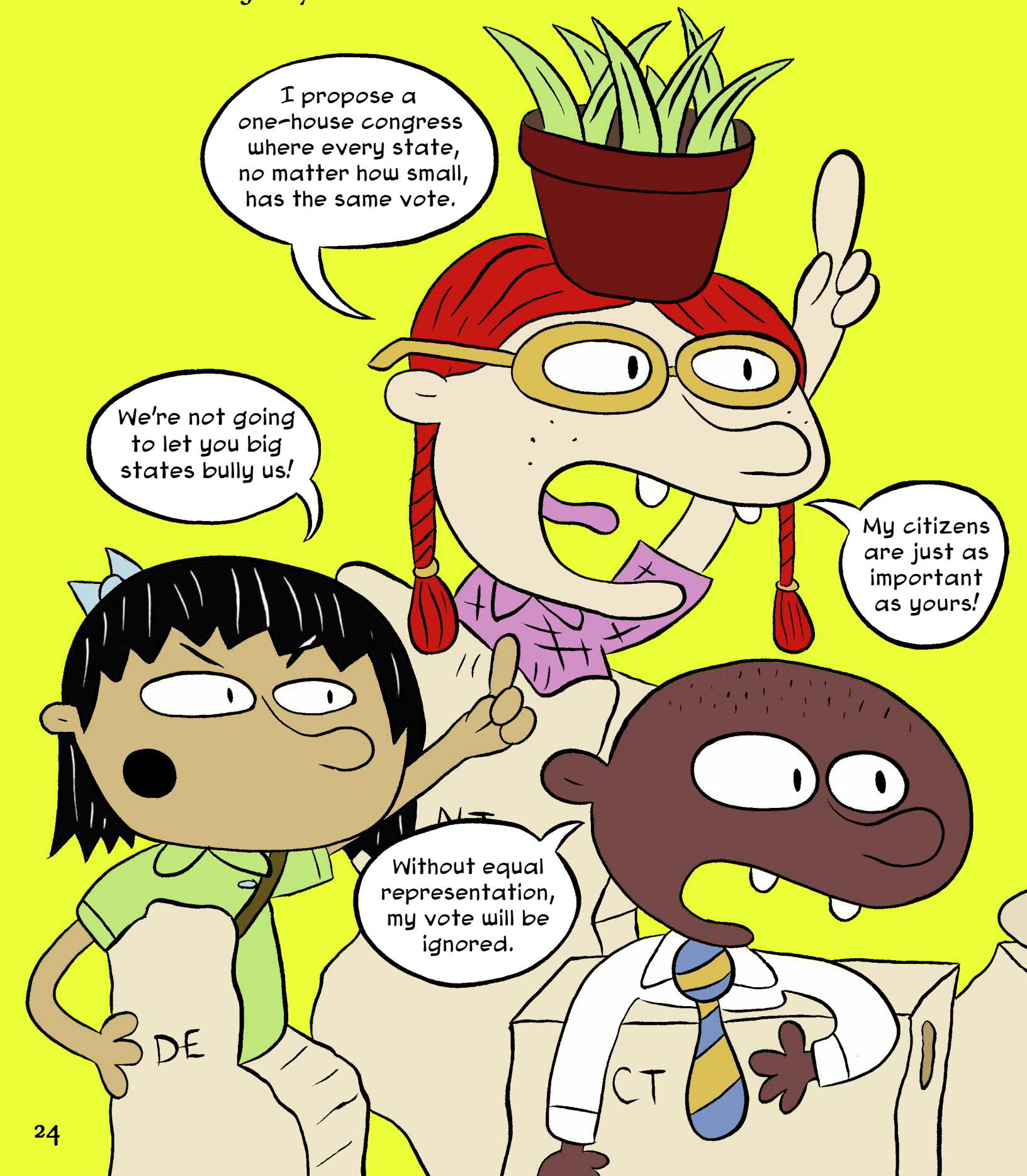

Virginia had an idea—an idea so different, it would have to replace the Articles of Confederation, rather than revise them.
I am proud to propose the Virginia Plan. It's a government with three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial.
The executive branch will be headed by a president to carry out the laws. The legislative branch will have a congress with two houses to make the laws. And the judicial branch will have a supreme court to settle disagreements.
Three branches? That's interesting. Tell us more.
VA
NY
JUDICIAL
LEGISLATIVE
EXECUTIVE
FLASH
FLASH
PRESS

I'm all for having a president. We can't go on being an octopus with all arms and no head! But what about a two-house legislature? Is that a good idea?
The British parliament has two houses. Most of our states have two-house legislatures.
Absolutely! With two houses, every law is voted on twice.
MA
NJ
VA

The Virginia Plan called for a new way of thinking. The states would have to give up some of their individual power in favor of a strong national government.

This wasn't an easy idea to accept, especially for the small states like New Jersey and Delaware, who were afraid the big states would outvote them in Congress.

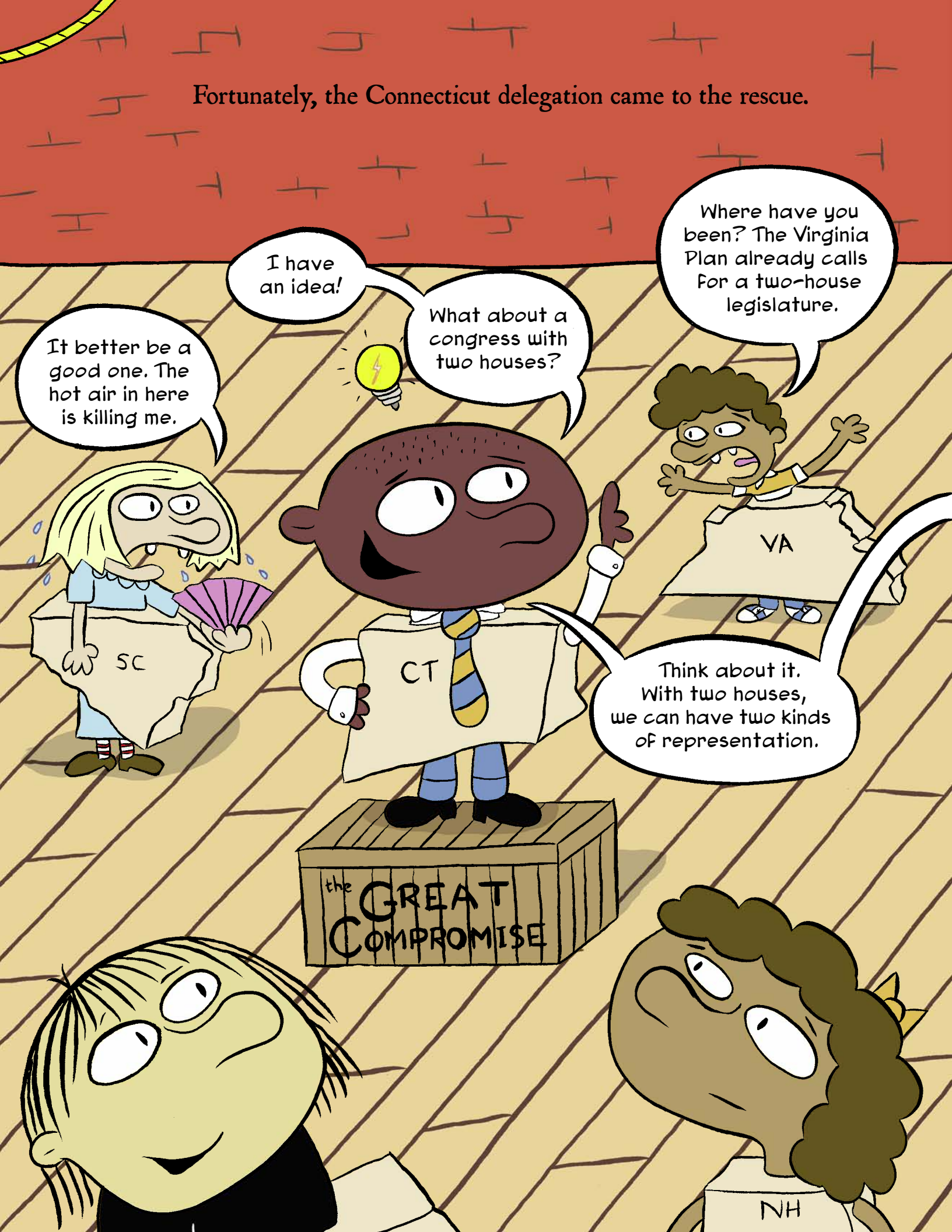
The smaller states counterattacked by presenting the New Jersey Plan.

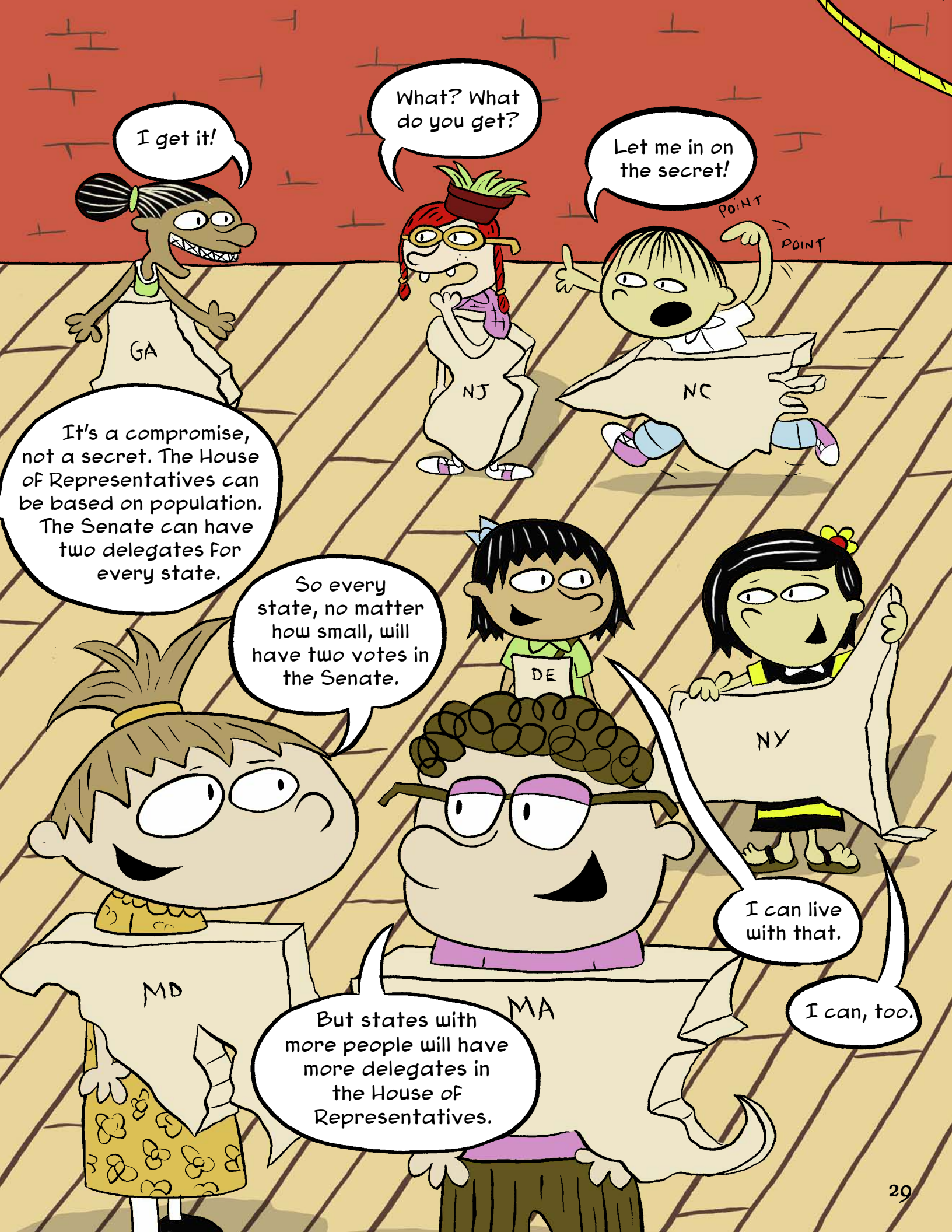


But this country should be governed by the people. That means states with more people should have more say in Congress.
Sounds reasonable to me.
VA
PA
SC
My ears hurt!

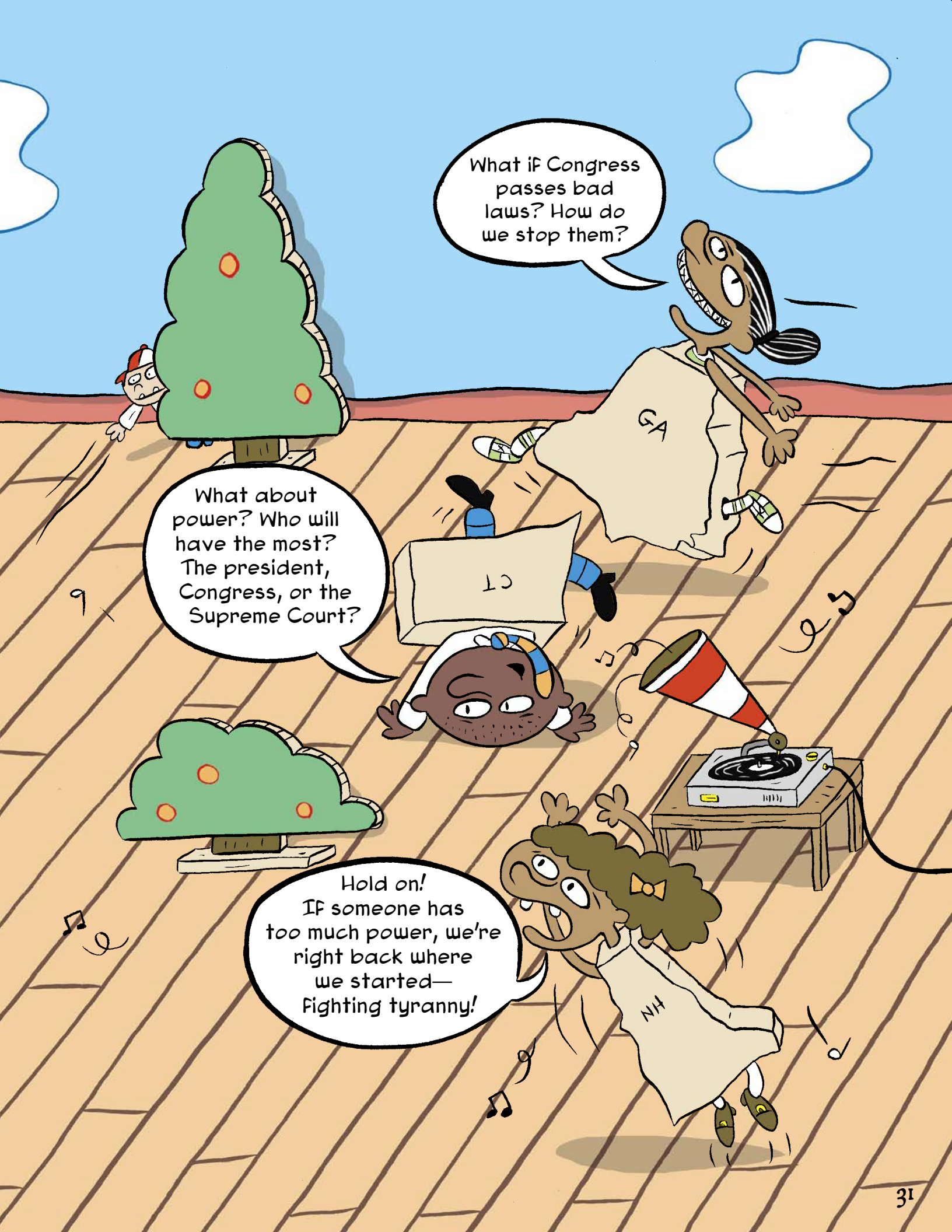
The big states and the small states argued for weeks. Delegates became discouraged. George Washington looked haggard, as if he were reliving the terrible days at Valley Forge.

NJ
MD
SC
DE
PA
Will the United States of America survive?

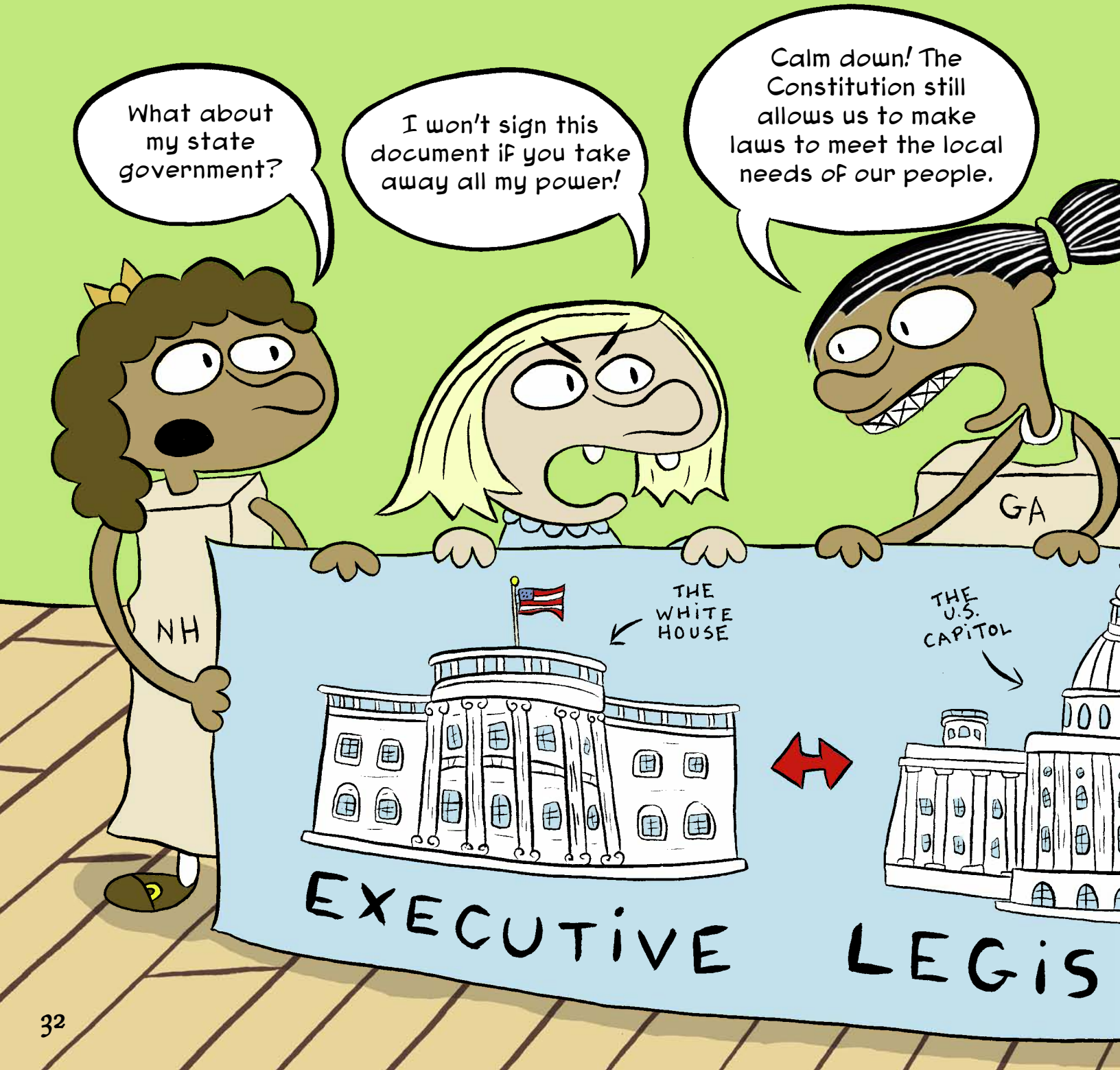

Fortunately, the Connecticut delegation came to the rescue.
I have an idea!
What about a congress with two houses?
Where have you been? The Virginia Plan already calls for a two-house legislature.
It better be a good one. The hot air in here is killing me.
SC
CT
VA
Think about it. With two houses, we can have two kinds of representation.
the GREAT COMPROMISE
NH

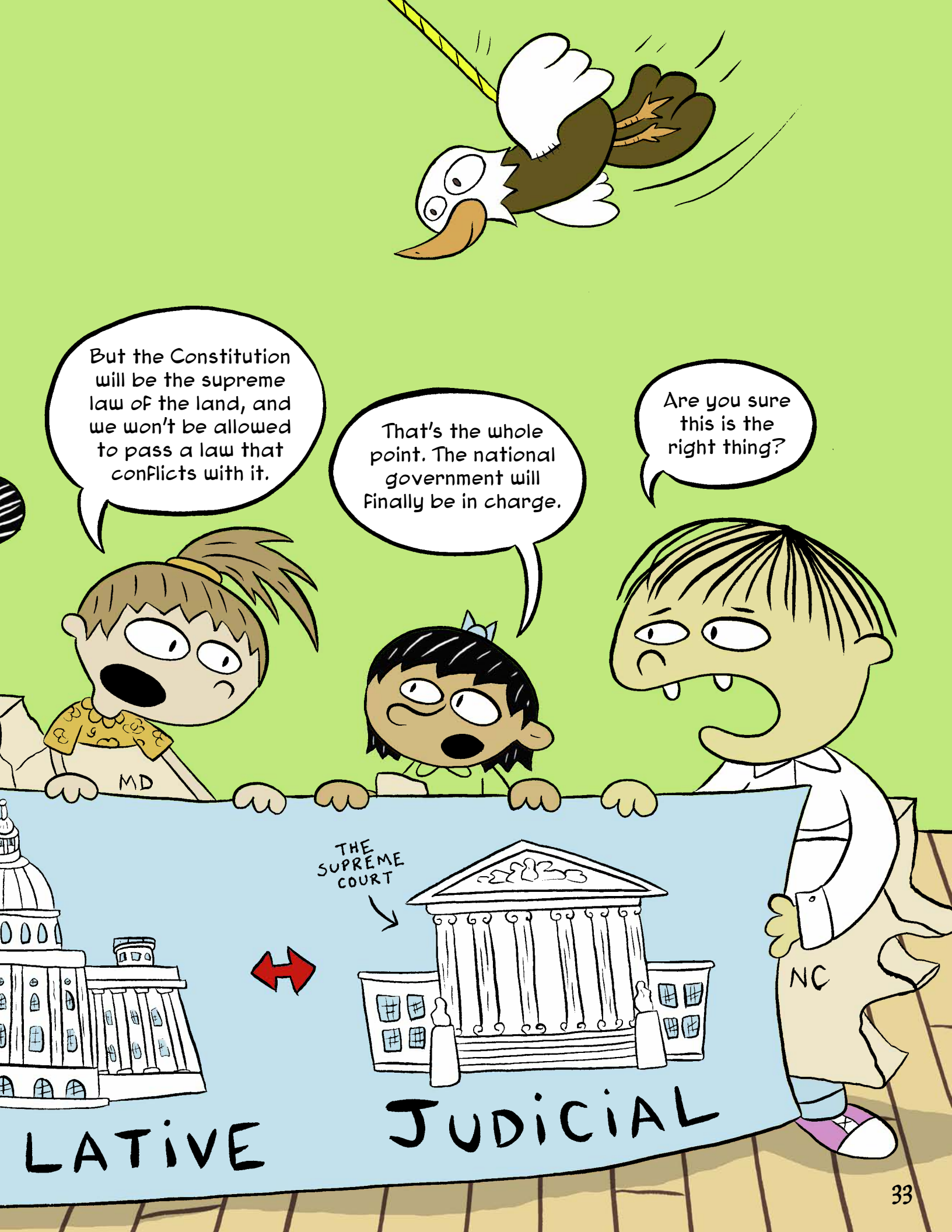

I get it!
What? What do you get?
Let me in on the secret!
POINT
POINT
GA
NJ
NC
It's a compromise, not a secret. The House of Representatives can be based on population. The Senate can have two delegates for every state.
So every state, no matter how small, will have two votes in the Senate.
DE
NY
MD
MA
I can live with that.
I can, too.
But states with more people will have more delegates in the House of Representatives.

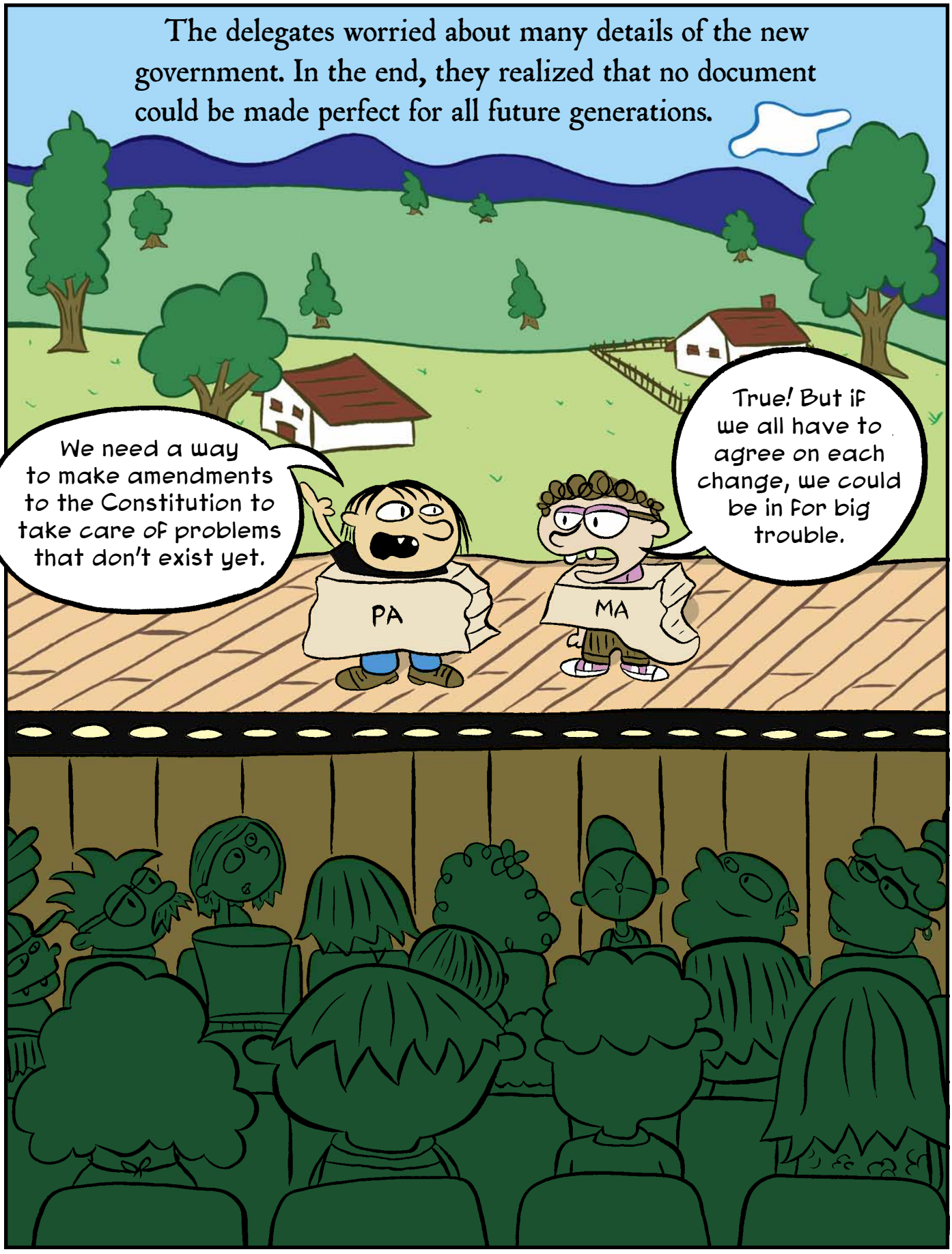
A major hurdle had been overcome. The delegates now had a framework for a new constitution. But there were still many other decisions to be made.


What if Congress passes bad laws? How do we stop them?
GA
What about power? Who will have the most? The president, Congress, or the Supreme Court?
CT
Hold on! If someone has too much power, we're right back where we started— Fighting tyranny!
NH

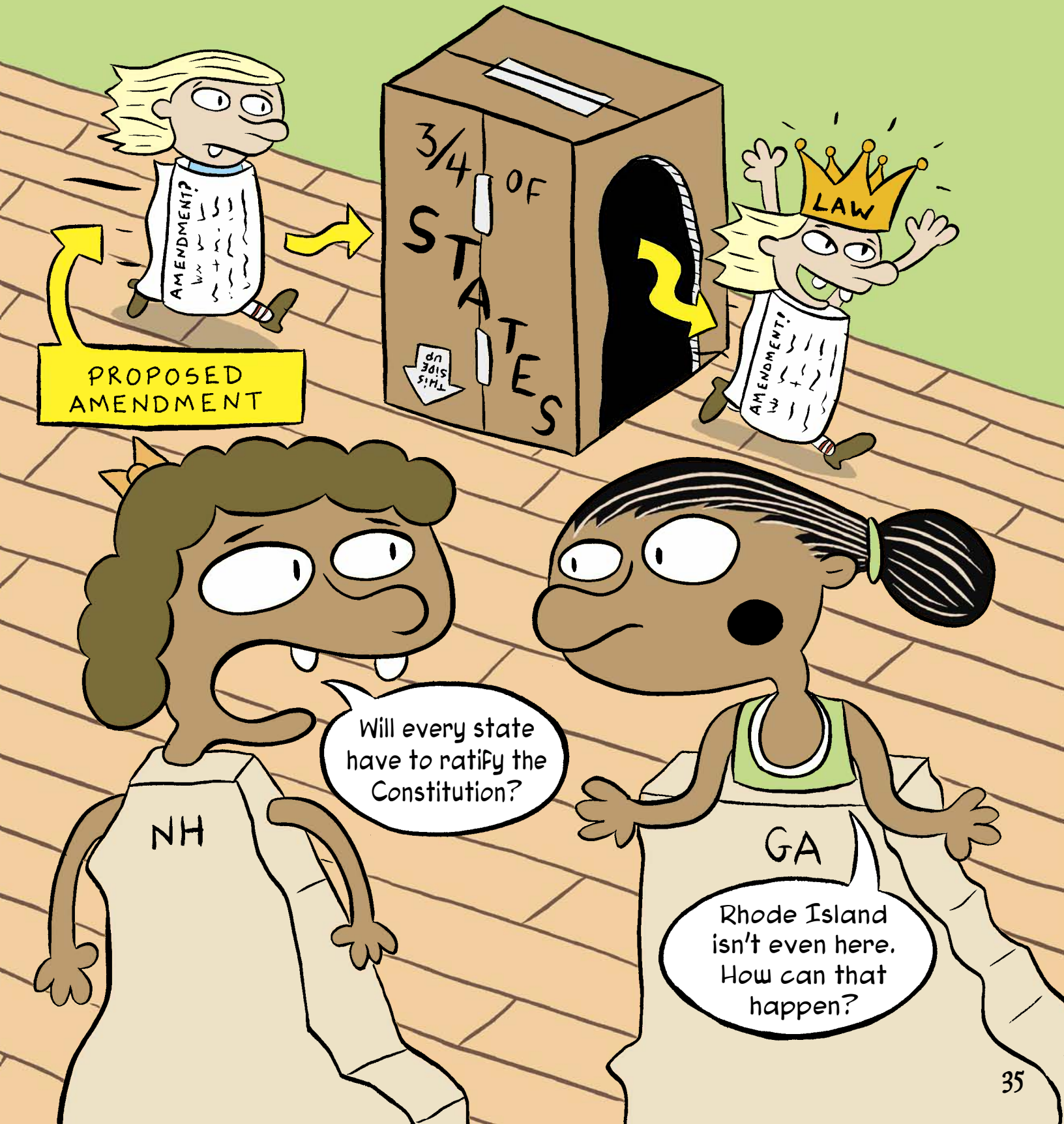
The powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches were carefully separated and balanced in the new constitution. For instance, the president can veto a law passed by Congress. Congress can remove a president from office if he misbehaves. Only Congress, not the president, can declare war. And the judicial branch has the power to settle disagreements between the other branches.




But the Constitution will be the supreme law of the land, and we won't be allowed to pass a law that conflicts with it.
That's the whole point. The national government will finally be in charge.
Are you sure this is the right thing?
MD
NC
THE SUPREME COURT
LATIVE
JUDICIAL


The delegates worried about many details of the new government. In the end, they realized that no document could be made perfect for all future generations.
We need a way to make amendments to the Constitution to take care of problems that don't exist yet.
True! But if we all have to agree on each change, we could be in for big trouble.
PA
MA

Because it would be nearly impossible to get unanimous approval for all changes, the Constitution says amendments become law if ratified (formally accepted) by three-fourths of the states.

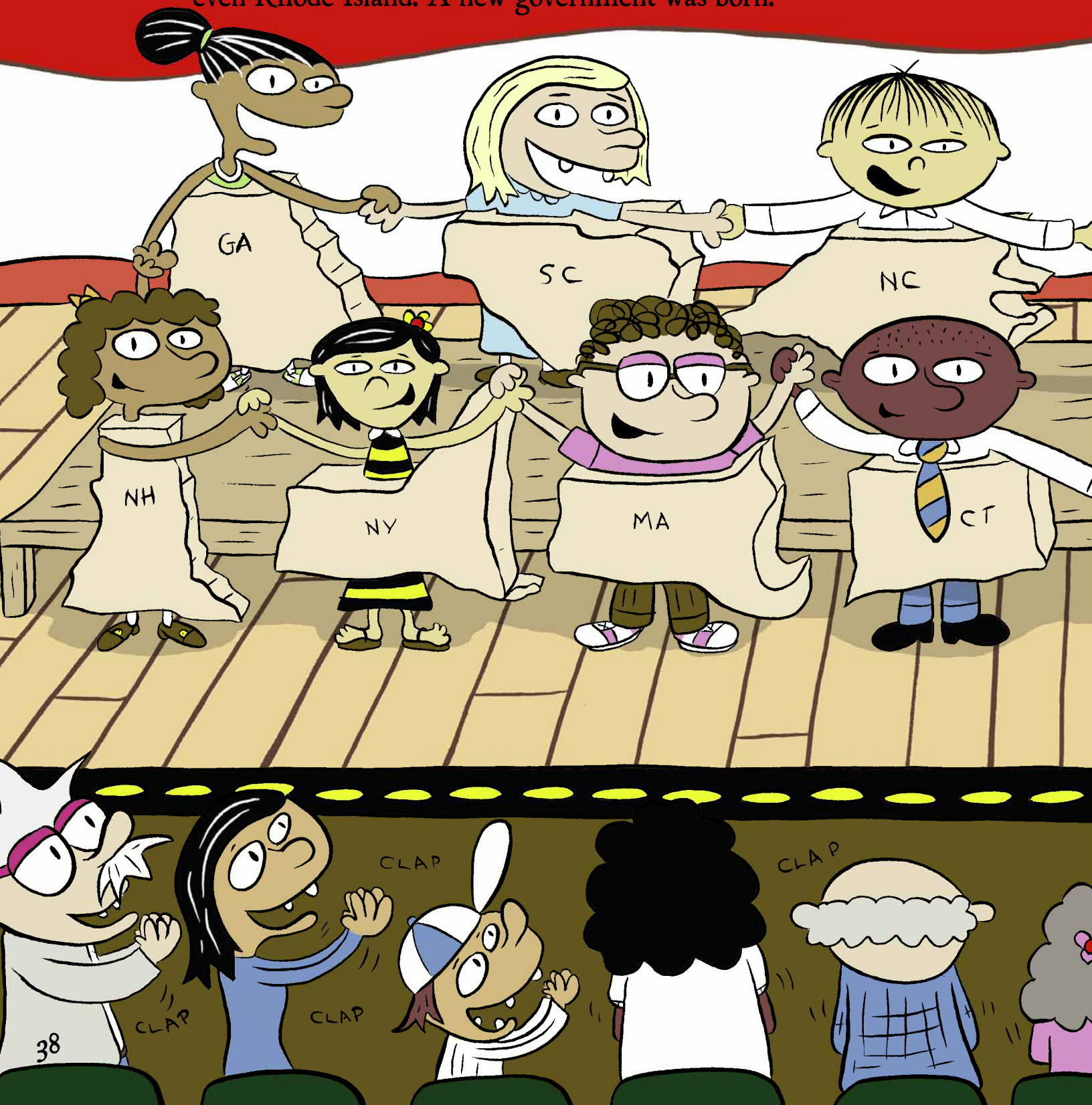


The final section of the Constitution, Article VII, says that the document would become law when nine out of the thirteen states ratified it.

SCRITCH
SCRITCH
We the People
Article 1
No

On September 17, 1787,

the United States Constitution was signed by representatives of twelve states. The ratification process was lengthy, but eventually all thirteen states approved the Constitution—even Rhode Island. A new government was born.



The United States of America!

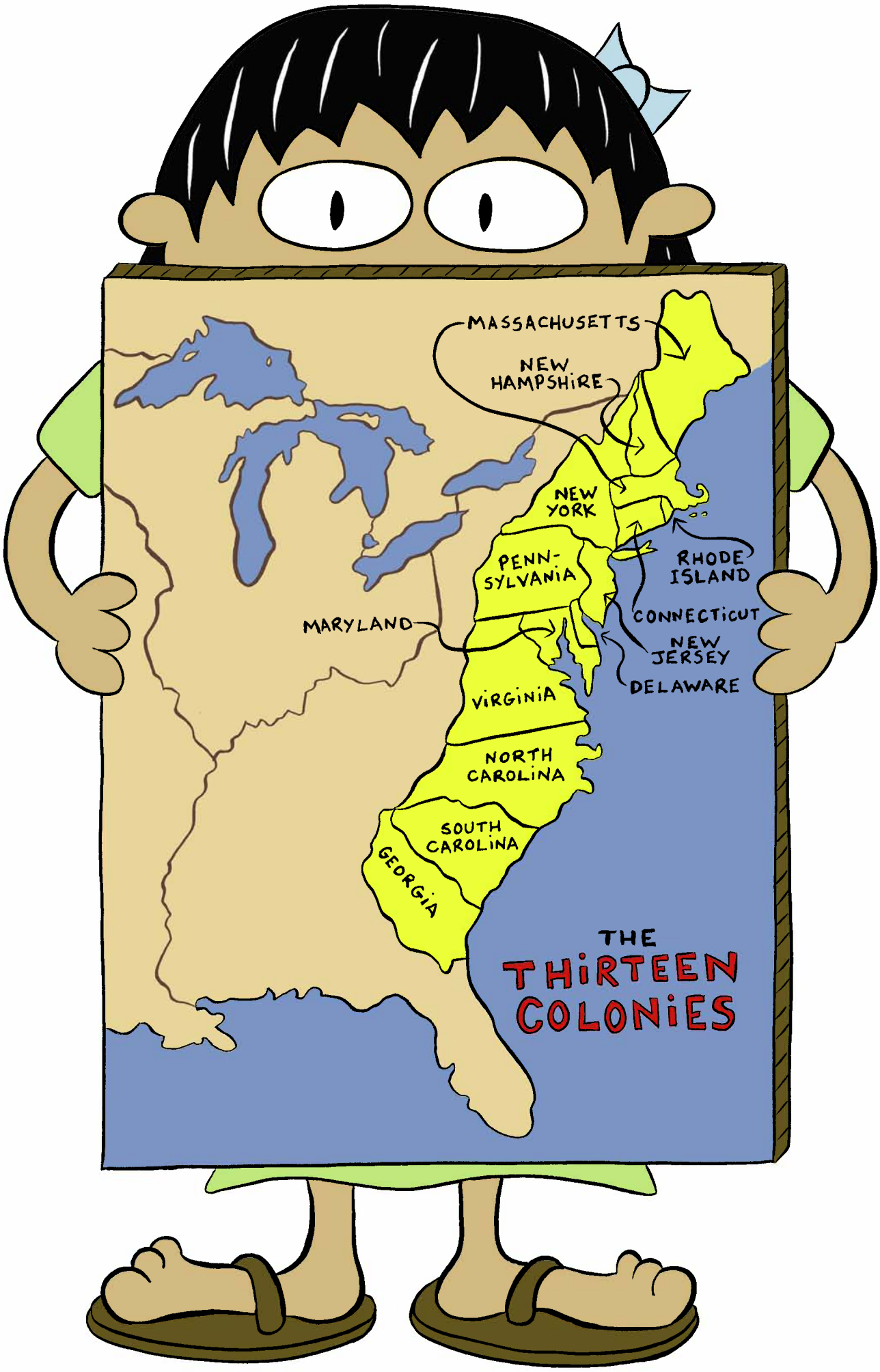
United at last and ready to govern ourselves!

Afterword

The Constitutional Convention took place in Philadelphia during the hot summer of 1787. Its purpose was to revise the existing Articles of Confederation, to solve the many problems among the states. But the Articles of Confederation were so weak that the delegates soon realized they would need to come up with a completely new government to be successful. Fifty-five men from Massachusetts, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Hampshire, New York, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut met in secret for four months.

One of the largest debates focused on representation. When the states agreed to the compromise presented by the Connecticut delegation, it was a turning point. A congress with two parts, having equal representation in the Senate and representation based on population in the House of Representatives, solved one big problem. But there were other controversies and many important decisions. How should the president be elected? The document the delegates created carefully separated and balanced power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. This system of "checks and balances" ensured that no one branch of the government could take complete control.

The Constitution contains many specifics, such as how old our legislators must be to run for office, what the powers of Congress are, and how Supreme Court justices are selected. But the fifty-five white male delegates also created a document that could expand to serve a society not yet imagined in 1787. By including an amendment process, they acknowledged that the Constitution might need adjustments in the future. The voting rights of African American men were not guaranteed by the Constitution until the Fifteenth Amendment was passed in 1870. Women did not obtain the right to vote until the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. The Constitution was ingeniously designed as a living document, creating a government capable of serving Americans from generation to generation.


MASSACHUSETTS
NEW HAMPSHIRE
NEW YORK
PENN-SYLVANIA
RHODE ISLAND
CONNECTICUT
NEW JERSEY
DELAWARE
MARYLAND
VIRGINIA
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA
GEORGIA
THE THIRTEEN COLONIES

Notes

Page 9. Why wasn't the country united?

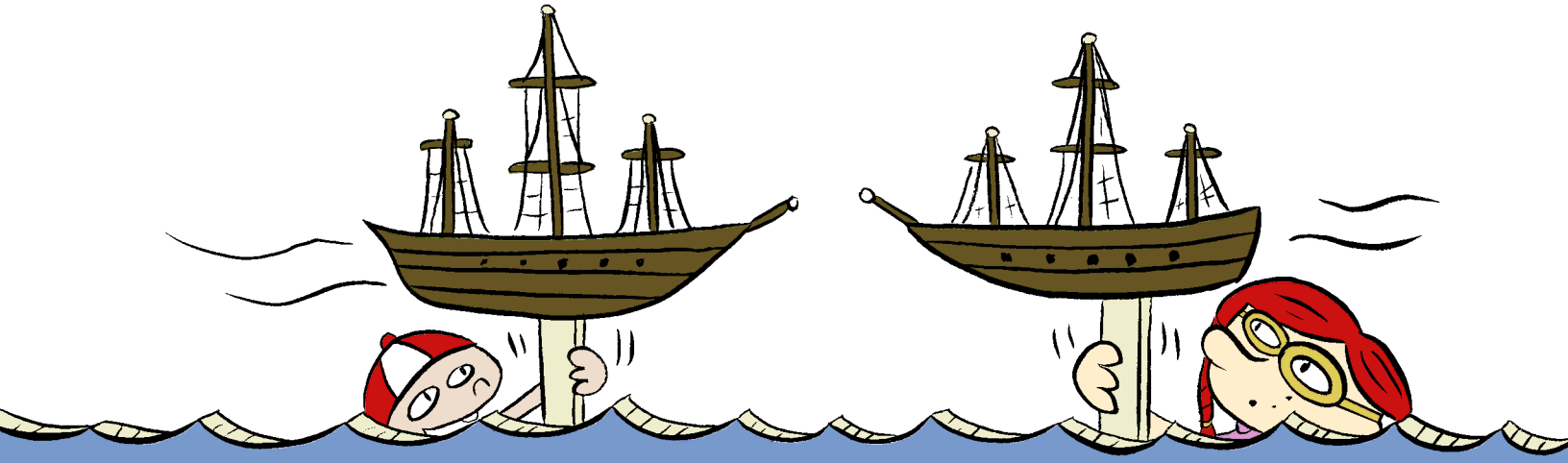
The Articles of Confederation stated: "The stile of this confederacy shall be 'The United States of America.'" But loyalty to the United States as a country was not firmly established. Most people considered themselves citizens of their particular states. The Articles of Confederation established only "a league of friendship" among the states, rather than a strong government with a leader.

Page 11. Who printed the money?

While the country operated under the Articles of Confederation, every state printed its own money. Traveling from one state to another was like visiting another country. The money was different, and so was the government. This contributed to economic and trade difficulties in the new country.

Pages 12-13. Who owned Vermont?

The land that later became Vermont was claimed by both New Hampshire and New York. Many states had border conflicts. Maryland and Virginia fought over rights on the Potomac River. Without a strong central government, the states were like a squabbling family.



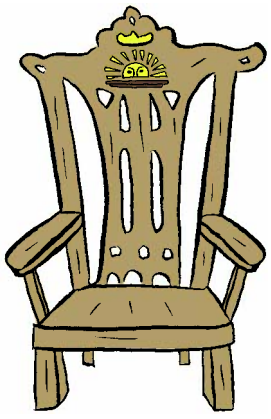
Page 12. Who was Daniel Shays?

Daniel Shays, a farmer and Revolutionary War veteran, was the leader of a yearlong rebellion in Massachusetts that began in the summer of 1786. The farmers were angry over high taxes and farm foreclosures. Armed with pitchforks and muskets, they closed down courthouses and attempted to take over the arsenal in Springfield, Massachusetts. The state government eventually crushed the rebellion, but the situation pointed out the need for a stronger federal government that could help states in times of crisis.

Pages 14-15. Why was Annapolis important?

The Annapolis Convention in 1786 was supposed to be a meeting of all thirteen states, but only delegates from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York came. Even Maryland, the state where the convention was held, didn't send delegates. While the original purpose was to solve trade issues between the states, the meeting identified the weakness of the Articles of Confederation as the overriding problem. The men at Annapolis decided to call another convention with the express purpose of strengthening the Articles of Confederation. A meeting that only decides to hold another meeting may not appear to be much of a success. But this decision laid the foundation for the writing of the Constitution.

Pages 17-19. What about those special chairs?



Benjamin Franklin did travel to Independence Hall in a sedan chair carried on poles by four men. At eighty-one years old, his health was poor, and it was too painful for him to ride in a carriage.

The back of George Washington's chair was decorated with a half sun. Franklin said he contemplated this design throughout the convention, wondering if it was a rising sun or a setting sun. At the end of the convention, when the Constitution was signed, Franklin was happy to report that Washington's chair was adorned with a rising sun, a symbol of promise for the future.

Pages 18–19. Why did they keep everything secret?

The delegates agreed right away on two things: they wanted George Washington to preside over the convention, and they wanted the proceedings to be kept private. Secrecy meant that the delegates could discuss the issues freely without worrying about the reaction of the press or the public. They were also free to change their minds. Some believe that secrecy was one of the keys to success. The rule was strictly enforced. Delegates kept a discreet eye on Benjamin Franklin, who loved to talk, making sure that he did not let any news slip unintentionally during a dinner conversation.

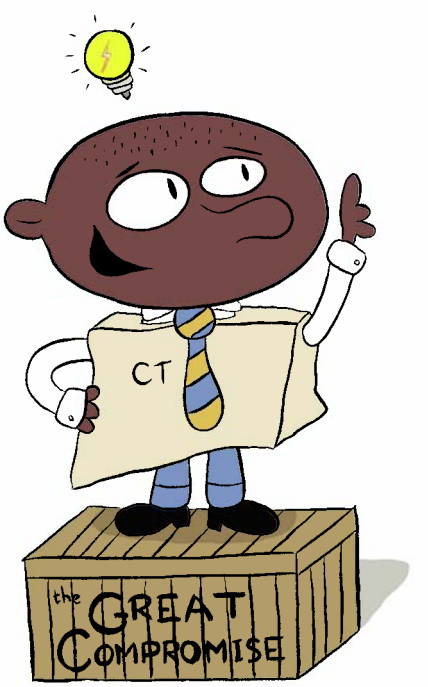
So how do we know what happened behind those closed doors if the press was not allowed to report on a day-to-day basis? James Madison, a Virginia delegate who later became president, attended every session and took careful notes of the proceedings. These notes are a primary source of much of our information about the convention.

He sponsored the Virginia Plan, which began the discussion of a new constitution. For his role as a leading figure at the convention, he was nicknamed "the Father of the Constitution."

Pages 26–27. Why did George Washington look so glum?

The issue of representation created a stalemate. Some delegates worried that the convention would break up. Benjamin Franklin called for prayer. And George Washington looked discouraged, the way he did at Valley Forge, one of the lowest points of the Revolutionary War. As president of the convention, Washington was largely silent. But his presence was extremely important. Washington had come out of retirement to show his support for a strong national government.

Pages 28–29. How did Roger Sherman save the day?



Roger Sherman, one of the delegates from Connecticut, is often credited with presenting the Great Compromise, also known as the Connecticut Compromise. This plan took advantage of a bicameral legislature, a congress with two houses. Under this system, every piece of legislation is discussed and voted on by two different legislative bodies. It must be passed by both houses before becoming law. Bicameral legislatures were common in 1787. England's parliament was composed of the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Many of the individual states had bicameral legislatures. Sherman's plan proposed that every state, regardless of size, have two representatives in an upper house, the Senate, and representation based on population in a lower house, the House of Representatives. It was a compromise that gave both the states and the people power.

Pages 32–33. Who does what?

The careful separation of powers among the branches of government even extends to the duties of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The House has the sole authority to introduce laws for raising taxes, and to choose a president if no candidate receives the majority of the electoral votes. The Senate has the sole power to ratify treaties and approve presidential appointees, such as Supreme Court justices. If an official is suspected of wrongdoing, the House can vote to impeach him or her. It is then the Senate's responsibility to serve as a court to convict or acquit the accused official. Members of the House of Representatives serve a two-year term, and senators serve a six-year term.

Page 34. How many things have been changed?

There have been twenty-seven amendments to the Constitution. Some of them modified governmental procedures. For example, the Constitution originally said that the person who received the second largest number of votes in the Electoral College—the runner-up—would be the vice president. This proved impractical with the advent of political parties and was changed with the Twelfth Amendment, ratified in 1804. Today, Americans vote for a president and a vice president.

Pages 38–39. What about Rhode Island?

Not only did Rhode Island refuse to attend the Constitutional Convention, it was the last state to ratify the Constitution. Rhode Island held an anti-federalist opinion that a strong central government would rob states of their individual rights. Those opposed to the Constitution were also disappointed that it had no protection for the individual freedoms of citizens. In response to this criticism, the first ten amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, were added in 1791. Rhode Island joined the union in 1790, two years after the Constitution went into effect.

Read the Constitution for yourself!

www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution.html

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For my son, Neal—J. J.

For Kyle Czekaj—J. C.

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